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THE BRITISH ACADEMY

TERCENTENARY OF THE FIRST FOLIO

THE ANNUAL SHAKESPEARE LECTURE
1923

The Foundations of Shakespeare's Text

By

Professor Alfred W. Pollard, C.B., F.B.A.

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ANNUAL SHAKESPEARE LECTURE, 1923

THE FOUNDATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S TEXT

BY ALFRED POLLARD, C.B.

FELLOW OF THE ACADEMY

Read April 23, 1923

THIS annual Shakespeare lecture in previous years has been given by distinguished students and critics of Literature who have concerned themselves mostly with the larger questions of Shakespeare's art, and year by year, as I have sat waiting in the audience, I have wondered how the lecturer who was about to address me would find anything fresh to say, where so much had already been said and written. Because Shakespeare is so inexhaustible my predecessors always *have* found something fresh to say, and yet I imagine that when each man braced himself to his task that difficulty presented itself to him as a real one. My own trouble is of a different kind. We are celebrating this year the Tercentenary of the publication of Shakespeare's Plays in the Folio Edition of 1623, and it is my privilege to ask your attention this afternoon to such problems as: what was the task which Heminge and Condell, the collectors and gatherers of the plays, and Edward Blount and William Jaggard their publishers, set before them? what materials were at their disposal? what use did they make of them? and how far can we be satisfied with the result? My trouble is that to some of these questions it is only possible at this moment to offer answers avowedly tentative and incomplete, because, as regards the Folio, so little work has yet been done along the lines in which I hope to interest you. Those lines are in their origin bibliographical, the method followed in bibliography being first to get all the information possible from the book itself and then to *interpret* this information in the light of all we know as to the methods of book-production at the time that it was printed and published. Of late years a good deal of useful work has been done in clearing up the problems of the single plays printed in small quarto before the publication of the Folio in 1623. That work has been done mainly by sorting the quartos into

groups and not only studying each quarto individually, but studying it also as a member of its group. Forty years or so ago, in prefaces to some of the Facsimiles of the early Quartos issued under the direction of Dr. Furnivall, real progress was made by the late Peter Augustus Daniel in determining the relation of the quarto editions of single plays to the texts of the same plays as they appear in the Folio. Mr. Daniel had the advantage of building on the foundations laid by the Editors of the (old) Cambridge Shakespeare, Messrs. Clark and Glover and Wright. But he advanced knowledge greatly, both in accuracy and extent, and we can only regret that he was not entrusted with the task of editing *all* the facsimiles. On the Folio as a whole, more especially on the plays which had not previously appeared in quarto editions, little work that can be reckoned final has yet been completed, and until we can group the plays according to the sources from which they appear to be derived, and then 'test this' grouping scene by scene, not much permanent progress can be made. Finally, in addition to all this work, there remains (to borrow the not very happy phrase applied to Biblical research) the Higher Criticism of Shakespeare, the effort to discover not only what happened to his text at the hands of printers and publishers, but something at least of what happened to it from the time that each play was first 'plotted' till it became stabilized in a final form. As to that most difficult of all problems you will be relieved to hear that I propose to say only a very little this afternoon, and that little mainly by way of a plea for moderation and a refusal to press too far methods which (I am yet confident), if cautiously used, should be fruitful of good results.

Our problem then is the Foundations of Shakespeare's Text. What are our materials, the necessary materials, for investigating it? The foundations of Shakespeare's text must have been laid in his study and in the playhouse. Any fragment of text which can be shown to be derived from Shakespeare or from the playhouse requires investigation. Until a text can be shown to be so derived it cannot be admitted as evidence. Applied to our problems this rules out all editions subsequent to 1623. On the face of them these are reprints, and until it can be shown that where they differ from the editions from which they are reprinted, these differences are the result of a new recourse either to Shakespeare's manuscripts or to the playhouse copies; they do not concern us, though they have their own interest.

We are left then with the Folio of 1623, and the forty-four editions of sixteen different single plays issued before it appeared. From the *Titus Andronicus* of 1594 to the *Othello* of 1622. Among

these editions of single plays we find that for *Romeo and Juliet* and for *Hamlet* we have for each play two texts so different from each other as to be clearly derived from different sources. Treating these rival texts as distinct we have then eighteen First Editions and twenty-six Reprints. We find that these twenty-six Reprints differ, each of them, in scores of lines from the First Editions from which they are derived. We examine these differences to see, not merely whether they are good or bad, but whether, when good, they must be due to a new consultation of Shakespeare's autograph or a copy of it, or may more reasonably be attributed to the cleverness of the printer's reader. In the case of each play we must consider this question both as regards each difference in itself and as regards each difference in relation to all the other differences. Moreover, while we must consider the evidence for each play by itself, we must also consider the evidence for all these twenty-six intermediate editions as a group. Taking the good readings introduced in these editions individually we find some whose goodness needs explanation, and explanations have been forthcoming, though I must not trouble you with examples this afternoon, interesting as they mostly are. Taking each intermediate edition by itself, in no single instance do we find evidence of the sort of care which could lead us to believe that its overseer had obtained access to any authoritative source. Taking the intermediate editions as a class we find that every time a play was reprinted new errors were introduced, mostly many new errors, and that the few corrections are nearly always such as any, moderately intelligent reader would naturally make for himself. As evidence of the words which Shakespeare wrote or of the words which were spoken by the actors engaged in his plays these intermediate editions are absolutely worthless, except where we possess only one or two copies of the First Edition. It is necessary to make that exception because, printing being a slow process in Shakespeare's day, corrections were sometimes made while a sheet of text was passing through the press, so that some of the copies printed would have a right reading, where others had a wrong one. A Second Edition might thus be printed from a copy of the First in which a correction had been made which does not appear in any copy of the First now extant. With this reservation all the intermediate editions are worthless as to the words Shakespeare wrote or the actors spoke, and all the later reprints, the third, fourth, and later editions, are worthless without any reservation at all.

For another purpose, however, the Intermediate Editions have one quite distinct value, that is as tests of the First Folio. They were in

existence in 1623 when the Folio was printed. Every printer knows the convenience and comfort of printing from type instead of from manuscript, and while the printer would be better pleased to print from the latest quarto instead of from manuscript, the publishers of the Folio had two good reasons for paying sixpence for a printed text and sending it to the playhouse to be corrected, rather than copying the whole play afresh; firstly, they would have had to pay their copyist more, and secondly, he would probably have made more mistakes. It can be proved that even when, as in the case of *Richard III*, recourse was had to a radically different text, the copy which the Folio printer received was one of the late quartos altered in accordance with the manuscript, and that readings, including obvious errors, which had originated with the Intermediate Quartos, thus got into the Folio, to the detriment of its authority. We must note also that this applies to punctuation as well as to words, that, for instance, the punctuation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the Folio, where it differs from that of the First Edition, is largely derived from the Quarto of 1619, and therefore cannot be authoritative. Thus in considering the authority of the Folio we must clearly deduct from it everything that can be shown to be derived from an edition itself of less authority than the First.

We are thus left with the eighteen First Quarto editions and the Folio (purged of any readings accepted from variants introduced into the later Quartos) as the twin Foundations of Shakespeare's text. What is the value of each of these? We take the Quartos first, and here we can make a further sub-division by separating into a group by themselves four of the First Quarto editions: the 1597 *Romeo and Juliet*, the 1600 *Henry V*, the 1602 *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and the 1603 *Hamlet*. Two of these editions were quickly superseded by much superior texts, the *Romeo and Juliet* of 1599 and the *Hamlet* of 1604. Not one of the four was used in printing the Folio. Their texts are shorter by from a third to nearly a half than those printed in the Folio; they are full of absurdities, though also 'good in parts'—the parts, it has been suggested, which were played by a minor actor, through whose treachery sections of Shakespeare's text were placed at the disposal of an unscrupulous printer, or of an uninquiring printer through the agency of an unscrupulous publisher. In the Address to the Reader in the First Folio there is a well-known reference to buyers of Shakespeare's plays having previously been 'abus'd with diverse stolne and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of iniurious impostors, that expos'd them' and the comforting assurance is given that 'even those are now offer'd

to your view cur'd, and perfect of their limbes'. It is submitted that this reference is not only explained, but *completely* explained, by the existence of these four bad texts, for each of which a radically different one was substituted in the Folio, and that there is no reason whatever to apply the epithets 'stolne and surreptitious' to any of the remaining First Quartos, which are of an entirely different character, and came into the world of books in a markedly different way.

The four quartos to which the epithets 'stolne and surreptitious' obviously apply I have ventured to call uncompromisingly the Bad Quartos, but I have already admitted that they are 'good in parts', and it has even been thought that they throw more light on the evolution of Shakespeare's plays than any other documents we possess. The other fourteen Quartos it is convenient to call, equally sweepingly, the Good Quartos, though the goodness of some of them is painfully obscured by defects, which have too hastily been ascribed to the innate weakness or wickedness of all copyists and compositors who have had anything to do with Shakespeare's texts. It is better to confess that some of the flaws in these Good Quartos are the result of imperfections in Shakespeare's own work, and I have ventured to claim that some of these Good Quartos may actually have been set up from Shakespeare's autograph manuscripts.

The argument is that in the absence of evidence making it impossible we are not entitled to assume that what *did* happen in the case of some plays by other playwrights did *not* happen to some plays by Shakespeare. In the case of some plays by other playwrights we find that it was the author's autograph manuscript which was first submitted to the censor and then used as a prompt copy and equipped with the notes and stage-directions necessary for this purpose. From the notes and stage-directions which occur in some of the printed quartos there is a high probability that these were printed from prompt copies, and if what happened with other plays by other playwrights is any guide to what happened to Shakespeare's, some of these prompt copies were probably in his autograph. Some of them, also, were probably *not*; but it may be claimed that at every stage in the passage of a play from Shakespeare's study the balance of probabilities is in favour of optimism. Thus, firstly, when there was a risk of piracy it would be foolish to increase that risk by making a single needless transcript. Secondly, in view of the insistence of the censor that a play should be acted in exact conformity with the copy on which the licence was inscribed, the greatest proof of obedience on the part of the players would be to put this inscribed copy in the hands of the prompter as a guarantee against gag. Thirdly, as a ready

means of persuading the wardens of the Stationers' Company that a play might be printed without special 'authority' being obtained for it, the production of the manuscript on which the censor's licence was inscribed, as the copy sent to the printer, would carry all before it. On the other side I can think of no countervailing argument except that the owners of the play would not be likely to let such a precious thing as a prompt copy out of their hands. But if, in place of their manuscript prompt copy, they could, within three or four weeks, get back a printed copy which could be used for the same purpose (and, in the case of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we have evidence that the printed copy was so used) this objection is greatly weakened. Without labouring this point further, I ask you to believe on the evidence of all the editors who have largely relied on these editions, while mechanically abusing them, that these fourteen good first quartos form a very solid section of our Foundations, sometimes supplying, sometimes rivalling, always at least supplementing the texts found in the Folio, and for the most part carrying with them the prestige of being based on versions used in the playhouse while Shakespeare was still connected with it. The producers of the Folio did not make the best use of this material. When later reprints were more easily obtainable they used these in preference to the originals, correcting them by the prompt copy which sometimes may have been of the original edition. In other cases, as in *Richard III*, they relied on a manuscript which they believed (in the case of *Richard III* wrongly) to be of higher authority. But the 'good' quartos have been recovered, thanks to the enthusiasm of collectors, and as regards most of these fourteen plays for which we have a double text our position is exceptionally good.

If the managers of Shakespeare's company were able to supply good texts, in some cases possibly autograph texts, to the printers of the Quartos whom they probably disliked (regarding them only as a preferable but still unpleasant alternative to pirates), it may seem reasonable to believe that when they authorized and cordially authenticated a collected edition of Shakespeare's plays they would be able to do as well or better. It is here, ladies and gentlemen, that we reach the Third Act of our Pleasant Comedy of the Fate of Shakespeare's Plays. As an incurable optimist I refuse to believe that the fate of these plays can rightly be regarded as Tragic. I claim to lead you up gradually to a happy ending. But in a Shakespearian comedy, so often illustrative of the theme 'the course of true love never did run smooth', there is often a moment when tragic possibilities are so evident that only the description of a play as a comedy assures us of

a happy ending. More than this, lest you accuse me of deceiving you, it must be remembered that the hero of a Shakespearian comedy is often a much more sober and disciplined person in the last act than in the first. He may have made mistakes and paid penalties; he may have run into dangers and difficulties and not escaped scot-free; and we may find that this is so with the hero of this lecture, Shakespeare's text. Our hero has begun well. The Good Quartos stand greatly to his credit. The attacks by the pirates have done no harm and have supplied valuable information. But we are now at the crisis of our Drama. We have to face two facts; the first, that the Globe theatre was burnt down in 1613, and there is no agreement at present as to what damage was then done to the collection of prompt copies or other theatrical manuscripts in the company's possession; secondly, that in 1623 something like a dozen years had elapsed since the last of Shakespeare's plays had been written, and some thirty since the production of the earliest, and such knowledge as we possess of how plays written by other dramatists were handled does not encourage us to believe that by any means all of the manuscripts available in 1623 were in the same state as when Shakespeare put his last touches to them.

Both of these points are serious, and I must repeat with especial reference to them my plea for indulgence on the ground that the work of investigation is far from complete. As regards the possible destruction of playhouse copies in the fire of 1613, alarm may at first sight seem superfluous. We know that many plays by Greek dramatists have been lost, because, while no manuscripts of them survive, quotations from them in the writings of other authors prove that they once existed. As far as I know we have no evidence of this or any other kind that any single play by Shakespeare has perished, the reference by Francis Meres (in his *Palladis Tamia* of 1598) to a *Loves Labours Won* being satisfactorily explained as pointing to *All's well that ends well* having been originally produced under the title which Meres quotes. If the Folio editors have delivered the goods, and *all* the goods, what need is there for pessimism? My pessimism does not, and cannot, extend to the survival of my hero. In the last act of a comedy he must appear, damaged, perhaps, but presentable. But is he quite the man we thought? Somewhat against my will I have to own that there is more in a passage of Dr. Johnson's preliminary advertisement of his edition of Shakespeare than I was willing to admit eight years ago. In his highly imaginative picture of the misfortunes which had befallen the text of Shakespeare's plays, Johnson asserted that they had been 'printed at last from compilations made by chance or by stealth out of the separate

parts written for the theatre', which he proceeds to write of as 'fragments so minutely broken and so fortuitously reunited'. I still think the words *by chance* and *fortuitously* the nearest approach to nonsense which the great Doctor ever made, but that the separate parts written for one of the actors who took the characters of Marcellus, Voltmar, the Second Player, &c., in *Hamlet*, the Host in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and various parts of moderate importance in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry V* were one of the sources from which the piracies of these plays were put together is highly probable. More than this there are three plays first printed in the Folio, the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Winter's Tale*, which, it has been plausibly maintained, were mainly or entirely put together from the Actors' parts reunited (*not* fortuitously) by means of the 'Plot' or list of the entrances of the various actors in each scene. The main evidence for this theory is that instead of the entrance of each actor being noted at its proper point, they are all massed together at the beginning of each scene. The text in these plays is by no means bad; as has been suggested, an actor's part is likely to have been legibly written and free from erasures. But there is no chance of a Shakespeare autograph in these 'Parts', and some risk both of omissions and gag. Our evidence as to their use as 'copy' for the Folio is cogent only for the three plays named, but it must be remembered that, if after 1613 it had been desired to revive a play which only survived in these 'Parts', a prompt copy would have had to be constructed from them, and this in the course of a few years would have been gradually filled out with the necessary entrances and exits and other stage-directions. On the other hand, we have prompt copies for the three parts of *King Henry VI*, which no one in 1613 would have been likely to trouble to reconstruct, if it had once perished, and there were certainly manuscripts of *Richard III* and some seven other plays first printed in Quarto. It is clear, therefore, that some manuscripts in addition to the theatrical 'Parts' survived, and it must always be remembered that we have no contemporary statement, such as has come down to us as to a later calamity of the same kind, that any manuscripts were destroyed at this fire. Save the peculiarity in the stage-directions of the three plays named there is really no evidence on either side, and the only reasonable attitude is thus that which would certainly be adopted by a Fire Insurance Company, a refusal to admit any claim as to which specific evidence cannot be produced.

Another alternative to which recourse might have been had if and when any prompt copies were destroyed has been surmised to exist in

copies of plays made for private patrons of the stage. We gather from a preface and prologue by Thomas Heywood that from about 1605 there was a sufficient demand for plays in manuscript to encourage shorthand writers to take them down at the theatre. We gather also that, when the theatres were closed during the Civil War, Beaumont and Fletcher's plays (mainly prompt copies) were temporarily in private hands and had to be bought back. The amateur of theatrical manuscripts seems to have had a real existence. We may imagine, if we please, that the text of *The Tempest*, with its elaborate literary stage-directions and careful punctuations, may be a text of this class, prepared for some play-loving courtier who had seen it acted at Whitehall and was willing to pay for a copy for his private reading, and again willing to lend it when the original text was lost. Here also we may be thankful for what we have, and yet admit that a prompt copy might have been better. I believe, however, that even when full allowance has been made for both these possibilities the possibility of plays printed from players' parts, and the possibility of plays printed from fair copies made for private patrons, any theory which assumes a large destruction of prompt copies in the fire of 1613 raises more difficulties than it explains.

Our second doubt, as to what may have happened to Shakespeare's plays between the time when he set his last personal touches to them and the handing over of the copy to the compositors in Jaggard's printing-house, is probably much the more serious of the two. To take the simplest case as an example: it is clear that Shakespeare, with all his amazing stage-craft, frequently wrote more lines than the actors were able to deliver in the time at their disposal. He himself, when emphasizing the brevity of plays, speaks of the 'two hours' traffic' of the stage. Perhaps in such a connexion two hours may stand for any time between two hours and three; but even granting this it means that a play of 3,000 lines would have to be delivered at the rate of over a thousand lines an hour, and actors cannot deliver blank verse at the rate of much over a thousand lines an hour (especially if they insist on 'chanting' it) without risk of becoming incoherent. Yet *Henry IV*, *Troilus*, *Coriolanus*, *Lear*, *Othello*, and *Cymbeline* all exceed 3,300 lines; *Richard III* exceeds 3,600, *Hamlet* exceeds 3,900, and was probably performed in full as seldom in the seventeenth century as it is now, more probably still was never performed in full at all. Now if we take a case where we have both a Quarto text and the Folio, for instance *Lear*, we find that both texts have been abridged, and that there are some eighty lines in the Folio which the

Quarto omits, and some 190 lines in the Quarto which the Folio omits. How many lines there may have been in the original manuscript which *both* the Quarto and Folio omit no one can now tell. In the case of *Lear*, I think very few; but what about other plays, for instance, *Antony and Cleopatra* with its scenes of ten lines, of nine lines, of five lines, its two scenes of four lines? Were these scenes always as short as this? If you look at the scenes in *Lear* where the admirable 'Kent' explains successive situations to 'a Gentleman', and see how the Quarto has cut out some lines which the Folio retains and the Folio has cut out some which the Quarto retains, I think that you will surmise that in *Antony and Cleopatra* also there have been cuts. Please remember also that the Folio editor has been proved by Mr. Daniel to have had a copy of the First Quarto of *Lear* before him, and could have printed the lines cut out from the theatre's manuscript if he had pleased. But he did not please. We have to face the fact that the producers of the Folio preferred the acting-version used in the playhouse, and if lines written by Shakespeare were omitted from that were content that they should perish. If that was a crime, they committed it.

Thus in all the longer plays by Shakespeare, speeches may have been curtailed to save time, and passages omitted because the players considered that they were ineffective in representation. But several of the plays are quite short. *The Tempest* has under 2,300 lines, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 2,173, *Macbeth* 2,100, *The Comedy of Errors* 1,777. It may seem, at first sight, as if plays as short as these could have offered no temptations to the abridger. Unhappily, the whole question as to the occasions on which exceptionally short plays were acted is still obscure. It has been suggested that they were in request for performances in the provinces, for performances at court, for performances in private houses, even possibly for performances in the public theatres in the short winter afternoons, or on Sundays. These are all plausible suggestions; but for lack of proof they remain suggestions and little more. Yet though the occasions are doubtful, it seems certain that (despite intermediate lengths) short plays and long plays were theatrically distinct, and that while some short plays (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* I hope may be accounted one) were definitely planned as short, plays originally written as long were sometimes cut down to shortness, and plays originally written as short were occasionally expanded. It has been suggested with great plausibility that *The Tempest* was originally a much longer play than it now is, with the events which Prospero narrates to Miranda in the first Act represented in a series of scenes on the stage. There is even greater

reason to believe that *dreadful* things have been done to *Macbeth*, the adjective implying that not all of the changes made in *Macbeth*, perhaps not all of those made in *The Tempest*, were made by Shakespeare. That is a grim thought, and there are possibilities grimmer still, possibilities of additions as well as excisions. In the manuscript of the play of *Sir Thomas More* (an extraordinarily useful manuscript to study) there is a scene rewritten in a different hand, apparently for no other reason than to put in a few conspicuously feeble remarks by the Clown. Are there no additions of this kind in the received text of Shakespeare? What of *Macbeth*? Are all the Witch scenes Shakespeare's? We have seen how the text of *King Lear* was cut down alike in the Folio and the Quarto. Was the Fool's 'prophecy' at the end of Act III, Sc. ii ever in Shakespeare's manuscript? The Fool has sung his song,

He that has and a little tiny wit,
With hey ho, the wind and the rain,
Must make content with his fortunes fit,
Though the rain it raineth every day.

Lear answers with the patience he ever shows to the Fool: 'True, my good boy', and bids the disguised Kent 'come bring us to this hovel', and then we are to believe that Shakespeare made the Fool stay behind and speak his 'prophecy':

When priests are more in word than matter,
When brewers mar their malt with water,

and the rest of it. It seems improbable.

I have already disclaimed any desire to enter this afternoon into the more difficult questions of the Higher Criticism of Shakespeare. It was no part of the business of his earliest printers to distinguish between what he took from others and what was his own, or to mark by difference of type the changes and additions he made in successive rehandlings. In such a play as *Richard III* the modern editor of an unannotated text, whether he believes that the Folio or (as surely he should) the Quarto represents Shakespeare's latest text, has an impossible task of choosing in cases of obscurity between two readings, both of which have authority. The four pirated texts give us hints of much more extensive changes than we find in *Richard III*, and in most of the plays, if we look closely enough into them, we shall find enough discrepancies, enough evidence of what seems imperfect revision, enough diversity of style, to tempt us to believe that Shakespeare wrote all his plays in the years of his dramatic apprenticeship and spent the rest of his working life in constantly rewriting them. That

theory is not much more untenable than its opposite which envisages each play as the result of a continuous effort throughout so many weeks and then finished and done with. But discrepancies and loose ends and the reappearance of an earlier style in later plays can be explained in more ways than one. There is the possibility of rough drafts of plays, laid aside and developed later; the possibility, for which some evidence could be adduced, that Shakespeare's staying power as a dramatist was limited to half a play at a time, and that when he resumed work on it he may have been in a different mood and trusted too confidently to his memory; the possibility, lastly, that just as in dealing with the same situations Shakespeare expresses himself with curious similarity in plays of widely different dates, so when a generous lover has to be given a speech in a play as sombre as *King Lear* the speech shapes itself into the rhymes in which generous lovers pour out their passion in earlier plays. But all these considerations are this afternoon beside the point. They are problems for literary critics, problems for modern editors, but altogether outside the range of the actors, printers, and publishers who produced the First Folio. The charge a defender of these has to meet is that this edition is full of misprints, that in the longer plays lines and passages written by Shakespeare have been omitted, that in some of the shorter plays there has been drastic abridgement, and that now and again there seem to have been additions by other hands. It is a serious indictment. Some of you may be thinking that this Comedy of Shakespeare's text is not a Comedy at all, that the fate of his plays is tragic. Whoever thinks so is, to use a nice old-fashioned phrase, *sinning his mercies*. We have only to remember the fate of Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*, now represented by a few fine speeches overlaid with much alien buffoonery, or of the scanty and mangled texts of the plays of Greene and Peele, to recognize how great a miracle it is that Shakespeare's early work should have come down to us in so much better condition. These men were his immediate forerunners. They had prepared their audience to expect something more than had previously been offered. By their popularity homes had been made for the drama, so that plays needed no longer to be performed at the Cross Keys or other inns. And yet it is possible that some of their best work would have been lost had it not been preserved in plays which Shakespeare rehandled. It is a great thing, a very great thing, that every play which Shakespeare wrote, or in which he had any considerable share, has come down to us, and come down in texts which, if here and there they present difficulties to students, who rightly wish to understand the exact sense in which every word is used in every

passage, to the sympathetic reader, and still more to the sympathetic listener when the plays are acted or read, offer very few obstacles.

If any one persists in bewailing that the text of Shakespeare is not better than it is there is more to be said to him. If we go beyond the imperfections to the causes of the imperfections there is only one man to blame for them, and that is Shakespeare himself. If we are to blame any one, do not let it be the actors, or the printers, or the publishers. According to the standards of their day they all did extraordinarily well. Only if Shakespeare himself had lent a hand could they have done materially better. From 1594 onwards he was one of the two or three most important members of his Company. Quite a few years after 1594 he was already well to do. He ceased writing for the stage when he was about forty-six. After that he had some half a dozen years of leisure. Why did he not edit his own Plays and anticipate that volume of Ben Jonson's *Works* which appeared in the year of his own death? I think we may find two reasons, or perhaps two aspects of the same reason, which should content us. One of the impressions about Shakespeare which has been strongly forced on me, especially of late, is that he was all of one piece. He developed, but in his development he cast nothing away. His attitude towards life deepened, but his outlook remained the same. I think we may find this consistency in his attitude to his own work as a playwright. It was the well-attested custom of the time for a dramatist to sell his complete rights in his plays to one of the companies of actors, or to some agent acting on their behalf. The actors did what they pleased with the manuscript, abridged it, augmented it, caused it to be rewritten in part or whole exactly as they pleased. It was the custom of the day and was accepted, for even the complaints of the dying Greene are of the inhumanity of the actors in leaving him to die lonely and destitute, rather than of any literary outrage. Shakespeare profited by this custom in his early days. He took over other men's plots, other men's drafts, other men's completed plays, and did to them what he was told, transmuting copper and silver into gold with an alchemy all his own. We applaud what he did, and invent fine phrases to glorify that which, in modern dramatists, we should regard as monstrous. I think at times it was a bit hard on the men whose work he used, and that from our latter-day point of view it is an act of piety, not only to them, but to Shakespeare, to give them credit for what we can trace of theirs. But it was the custom of the day thus to take over plots and ideas and rehandle and improve them. Shakespeare profited by it in his youth; he did not protest against it in his old age. He could have collected his own plays, expunged from

them all that was not his, and prepared them for the press. As far as we know, or have any reason to guess, he did nothing of the kind. He had sold his work to the actors, and it was theirs to do with it what they would. He had seen no harm in trying to better other men's work; let other men better his—if they could. Because he took this course in his prosperous old age the Ghost of Greene can have had no terrors for him. But the matter goes deeper than this. One dramatist of Shakespeare's day did collect his plays, and edit them himself and dignify his craft by calling them his Works—Ben Jonson. He, too, was consistent. As far as I know he borrowed no plot, took over no scene from any earlier writer. He was an original artist—and he did not forget it or let his audience forget it. He was in a marked degree a self-conscious artist, and his plays are full of his self-consciousness. Do we wish that Shakespeare's plays were more like Ben Jonson's? It has been contended that it is characteristic of the English race that its best work has always been done with a striking absence of any realization of what was being achieved. When we have builded our best, we have never quite understood what we were building. Surely in this Shakespeare was most characteristically one of his race. He was a self-conscious artist in his youthful Poems and Sonnets, and if these alone had survived he would have ranked high among his contemporaries but hardly have been heard of in lands where English is a foreign tongue. He was utterly unselfconscious in his plays, and his plays have penetrated to the very ends of the earth. It was part of the price of this greatness that he should be careless of them and their fate.

But what a price it might have been! what a Tragedy. And what a magnificent reversal of the ill-fortune which threatened their destruction when seven years after Shakespeare's death the Folio appeared with thirty-six plays in it, so many of which had never been in print before! The adventurers were seven, rather a motley little crowd. Two old friends of the theatre, Heminge and Condell, anxious 'to keep the memory of so worthy a friend and fellow alive'; Edward Blount, the faithful friend of Marlowe; William Jaggard, who as early as 1599 had set so high a value on Shakespeare's name that he had taken part in setting it on the title-page of *The Passionate Pilgrim*, which contained but five poems of his, and those stolen; Isaac Jaggard, his son; John Smethwicke and William Aspley, who in 1623 represented the original publishers of several of the 'Good Quartos', which we are bound to believe were honestly come by. What brought this motley little crew together? Probably Ben Jonson's volume of 1616 put the idea of a Shakespeare volume into

men's minds. Shakespeare and Jonson were friends, but their friendship was compatible with a good deal of sparring, and their respective adherents doubtless sparred also. Jonson had collected his plays; why should not Shakespeare's be collected? But 1616, 1617, 1618 passed and to the best of our knowledge nothing was done. In 1619, when still nothing has happened, William Jaggard seems to have planned with Pavier and Arthur Johnson and Nathaniel Butter, men whose traffic in Shakespeare's plays had been a good deal less reputable than that of those whom Aspley and Smethwicke represented, a miscellany of all the plays they could collect by or attributable to Shakespeare. Ten plays (one in two parts) were put into print, a curiously strange assortment: 2 and 3 *Henry VI*, not as they appear in the Folio with Shakespeare's final revision, but as printed in 1594 and 1595, with how much or how little of Shakespeare's work in them is never likely to be settled; *Pericles*, in which he had a hand; *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, with which it is incredible that he had anything to do; then five genuine plays, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King Lear*, and *Henry V*, of which the first and last were reprints of the old piracies; then another play, *Sir John Oldcastle*, which Shakespeare can never have touched. *Henry V* was left anonymous as in the original piratical edition of 1600: on all the other plays, including *A Yorkshire Tragedy* and *Sir John Oldcastle*, Shakespeare's name was printed in full as that of the author. There is clear evidence in the continuous lettering of the sheets of the first three plays that it was originally intended to prefix some sort of collective title-page covering the whole miscellany. There is bibliographical evidence that by the time *A Yorkshire Tragedy* was in hand this intention was abandoned, and all the last five plays bear the dates of earlier editions (*Henry V* a wrong date, 1608 instead of 1602), a recognized trick in reprinting books liable to be censored. What does it all mean and what has it to do with the First Folio? It means—among other things—that William Jaggard the printer and the three publishers, Pavier, Johnson, and Butter, were convinced that Shakespeare's name would sell a miscellany even of this kind, and (as I view the evidence) that their unscrupulous faith convinced the honest men at the Globe theatre that they must at last get to work. When men are hesitating to take up a venture there is no greater spur to action than to see some one else trying to forestall them, and this spur, I think, the volume of 1619 supplied to the organizers of the Folio. In an adventurous article in *The Literary Supplement to The Times* (March 22, 1923) Mr. Crompton Rhodes has given reasons for believing that the players appealed to the Earl of

Pembroke, then Lord Chamberlain, and that the Earl addressed a letter to the Master and Wardens of the Company of Stationers, advising them 'to take order for the stay of any further impression of any of the playes or interludes of his majesties servants without their consent'. But William Jaggard, Pavier, Johnson, and Butter were all men of some hardihood, difficult to suppress, and in the end Jaggard and his son, possibly after some arrangement with their friends, were given the printing of the Folio, and had the pleasure of superintending the setting up of the address 'To the great Variety of Readers, with its denunciation of the frauds and stealthes of iniurious impostors', which they could apply as they liked. We must thank Heminge and Condell for that touch of humour, and for much else besides. As the gatherers of the copy for the Folio they exercised considerable care. No use was made of any of the bad quartos. The sadly late editions of some of the good quartos used to save copying were read with prompt copies or other sources at the playhouse. Manuscripts of all the plays not already in print were hunted out. Ten years hence, I hope, we may know more than we do now as to what these manuscripts were. To-day we can only see that there were real difficulties to contend with and that in one way or another these difficulties were overcome. It was taken for granted that the stage-manager knew his business, and that the form in which each play had survived at the theatre was the form in which it should be preserved in print. There was some rough dividing into acts and scenes, but little other editing—a cause of thankfulness rather than regret. But somehow a text was produced which, however far short it falls of what specialists could wish, has yet been good enough to allow Shakespeare to become the most famous of Englishmen, and the delight of men and women all over the world. Surely these men also builded better than they knew.

